



State Representative **Doug Ericksen**

2003 Session Review

42nd Legislative District

Sept. 2003

Dear friends,

The 2003 legislative session adjourned June 11, after completing its regular 105-day session and two special sessions.

Every year the Legislature is involved in making many difficult decisions, and this year was certainly no different. When we convened in January, legislators were faced with fixing a record \$2.6 billion budget deficit and creating jobs to help pull Washington out of the weakest economy we've seen in years.

My personal goals for the 2003 session were to:

- Protect Washington's quality of life and our environment
- Balance the state general fund budget without raising taxes
- Maintain our commitment to public education
- Improve Washington's business climate
- Create a transportation package focused on improving our highways and making needed efficiency improvements

I'm pleased to report that we achieved much of what I set out to accomplish.

I am very disappointed that we were not able to adopt significant reforms to our health care system. I supported major legislation to lower the cost of health care and improve access to health care for small businesses. Unfortunately, after it passed the Senate with bipartisan support it was blocked in the House. Common-sense legislation to help boost our state's business climate met the same fate. I will continue to work on these issues in the next legislative session.

The following newsletter highlights some of the major issues of the session. I hope that you will take a few minutes to review the information and contact me if you have any questions or comments. Knowing how you feel about the issues affecting you and your family helps me to serve you better.

God bless America,

Doug Ericksen
State Representative, 42nd Legislative District

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Balancing the budget without new taxes

Adopting a responsible, sustainable operating budget was the Legislature's number one priority this session. The reality is the \$2.6 billion deficit didn't happen overnight. Rather it snowballed after several years of adopting unsustainable budgets that were balanced by resorting to gimmicks. I began the session with a strong resolve not to make matters worse by digging out of our budget hole with tax increases. Doing so would only further hurt our economy.

To ensure a no-new tax budget was adopted, I worked with fellow Republicans in the House and Senate to create a responsibly balanced budget and policies that will put Washington on the track to economic recovery and bring some common sense back to government. Although the sailing wasn't always smooth, in working with Senate Budget Chairman Dino Rossi and Gov. Locke, House Republicans held together to prevent a nearly billion-dollar tax increase supported by House Democrats.

It is very important to note that even without raising taxes, our state's operating budget grew from \$22.6 billion to \$23 billion.

Here's what we were able to accomplish without raising taxes:

- ✓ Teachers in the first seven years of their careers will get a deserved salary increase.
- ✓ By the second year of the budget, starting teachers will earn more than \$30,000 a year.
- ✓ The budget includes \$30 million more for class-size reductions than the governor requested, boosting the per-pupil grant to \$254 per student.
- ✓ The budget funds parks – no additional parks will be closed.



Protecting Our Environment

One of the highlights of the 2003 session was how the Legislature was able to come together to protect our quality of life and our environment. We made great strides in protecting the environment — while also protecting the jobs we need.

It was an excellent example of what can be accomplished when partisanship is replaced by good public policy. It does not matter if you

are a farmer, a lumberjack, a business owner, or a government employee — we all care about clean air, clean water, and protecting the environment that makes our state special.

House Bill 1002 – Reducing the amount of mercury in the environment – On May 14, the governor signed HB 1002 into law. Passage of this legislation has been hailed as a huge win by environmental leaders and model legislation by employer. The original mercury bill introduced in the House would have driven major employers out of



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Washington, increased costs to small businesses and our schools, and provided very little in terms of measurable environmental protection. When rhetoric was replaced by good policy, a final bill emerged that will protect our environment and protect jobs.

RMAPS – In my first term as a state representative, I worked to create the Forest and Fish Agreement. You may have seen on television the successes of this legislation being highlighted. Like all major pieces of legislation, however, it isn't perfect. One of the major problems of the Forest and Fish law is the impact that it has had on small timber landowners. In particular it contained costly road maintenance requirements for small timber parcels. The cost of these requirements was far too high and would force many landowners to convert their property to non-timber uses, often to housing.

With strong leadership from both Republican and Democrat rural leaders we began working to fix this problem. While we still have more work on this issue, we are clearly moving in the right direction. It is high time Washington recognized the valuable contributions made by the timber industry to our state, and particularly to our rural communities. Timber is not a four-letter word and we must work to protect this valuable industry.

Building Roads – Not Bureaucracies

As the lead Republican on the House Transportation Committee, I drafted legislation with an entirely new slant in solving Washington's transportation crisis. My proposal was focused on adopting transportation efficiencies and accountabilities, before requesting new revenues. In what became known around the state as the "5-for-5" proposal, I linked five major pieces of policy reform to a five cent increase in the gas tax dedicated to specific projects aimed at relieving congestion and stimulating economic growth.



My focus has always been, and will continue to be on making the system work better so your tax dollars build projects, not bureaucracies.

The decision to move forward on transportation issues following the defeat of Referendum 51 was not an easy one. In the end, however, I supported the final transportation budget based upon four sets of criteria:

1. The foundation for the transportation package is building roads.
2. The tax increase is significantly lower than R-51.
3. Adopting real reforms will ensure better use of taxpayer's money.
4. Whatcom County will see the same number of improvements as in Referendum 51 at half the cost.

As the Gateway to the Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010, it is vital we prepare our transportation system. I am starting now to ensure that transportation projects in our area become top priorities for completion before 2010. Completing these projects early will not only benefit Whatcom County, but will benefit all of Washington as tourist dollars pour south out of Canada.



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■ Making 2004 the Health Care Year

Looking ahead to 2004, I will be working to make health care the major issue of the 2004 legislative session.

There is much to be done to make health care more affordable and available to all. It is vital for all Washington citizens to have access to health care coverage and afford-

able prescription drugs. In particular, we must do all we can to ensure our seniors are able to access the medications they need.

I look forward to meeting with local leaders and community members to bring the focus onto this important issue.

I'd like to hear from you!

If you have questions or ideas about issues being addressed by the Legislature, I'd like to hear from you. Please provide the information below. You may also contact me directly via e-mail at **ericksen_do@leg.wa.gov**. I'll be out and about in the community attending events, meetings and the like. Please feel free to let my office know of any meetings or events that are scheduled to occur and for which you'd like my attendance or participation.

I look forward to seeing you and hearing from you during the upcoming months. Please feel free to give me a call with your comments, ideas or questions at 312-8110.

Name _____

Address _____ and/or

E-Mail _____

Comments: _____

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